A DISCOURSE

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

NEW YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY,

AT ITS FORTY-FIRST ANNIVERSARY, 20TH NOVEMBER, 1845.

BY

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NEW YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

New-York, November 20th, 1845.

At a meeting held in the Chapel of the University, the first Vice President, Hon. Luther Bradish, in the Chair, on motion of Dr. Alexander H. Stevens, seconded by Judge Samuel R. Betts, it was unanimously

Resolved, That the thanks of the Society be tendered to Mr. A. W. Bradford, for his able and excellent discourse, and that a copy be requested for publication.

Extract from the minutes.

ERASTUS C. BENEDICT,
Secretary Pro. Tem.

Like as there is in every artificer a reason of such like things as are to be made by his craft; So likewise it behooveth that in every Governour there be reason and a foresight in the governing of such things as shall be ordered and done by him to them that he hath the governance of. And forasmuch as Almightie God is the Creator and Maker of all creatures, to the which he is compared, as a workman to his Workes, and is also the Governour of all deeds and moovings that bee found in any creature; therefore as the reason of the wisedome of God (inasmuch as creatures bee created by him) is the reason and foresight of al crafts and workes that have been or shall bee, so the reason of the wisedome of God, mooving al things by wisedome made to a good end, obtaineth the name and reason of a Law.—*The Dialogue between a Doctor of Divinitie and a Student in the Lawes of England.*

A DISCOURSE.

Law is defined to be a rule of action. Experience shows that in all ages and under every condition of Society, Man has substantially recognised the truth, that the very existence of an object, implies that it must exist and act according to certain definite Laws.

Even Chaos, termed in the Theogony of Hesiod "First of all beings," though the peculiar, characteristic type of Deformity, Lawlessness and Disorder, possessed constituent elementary rules of action, whence proceeded the order, harmony and beauty of nature. The mythic Chaos contained the seeds of the Organism of the world,—so thoroughly unnatural is the conception of Being without Law. Such a negation involves the annihilation of all created existences. The idea of absolute chaotic confusion is in truth absurd and monstrous. Anarchy is impossible either in the physical or moral universe; the notion is abhorrent to the soul, reason rejects it, our own bodies, and the vast creation in the midst of which we stand are living witnesses against it.

But, Law is the emanation of a Superior Power; and hence the reference of the active energies of matter to a Superior Presiding Intelligence, is among the first and simplest acts of the mind. On this basis religious systems have been erected, varying, according to the intellectual condition of different races, from Polytheism in its most degraded form, to the recondite Mythology of Classical

Antiquity, and perhaps to a Pure Theism. The Truth thus recognised by the consentient voice of mankind, and of which we may say in the nervous words of Cicero, *insitam, innatam, insculptam, in animo*, may briefly be stated in this form,—Being implies the existence of Law, and Law suggests and involves the idea of a Lawgiver whose character and purposes are seen in and stamped upon his works.

The flood of light which in this age has been shed upon the mechanism of physical creation; the nice adjustment and contrivance, the wonderful skill, the felicitous adaptation, the exquisite symmetry, the beneficent design, which modern Science has traced throughout the great framework of nature, and the organic structures which fill it, have made our minds familiar with the application of the principle just announced, to Material Objects. But there is a higher and nobler portion of creation within the application of the same principle,—I mean Man. Though we see the hand of God in the admirable and beautiful conformation of his body, we recognise far more glorious proofs of divine workmanship in the Living Soul within. When the knife of the anatomist lays bare the complex and delicate machinery, which sustains the vital action of the Body, we may turn from these evidences of care and skill lavished upon the perishable frame, to the Mind which dwells there, and discover also in its structure, wondrous and incomparable ingenuity, order, beauty and wisdom, worthy of its transcendant capacity and powers. What we have said of Matter, therefore, must be said of Spirit, what has been assertedo f physical nature must be said of Man,—that he exists and acts in accordance with Laws divinely instituted. But if this be true of the Individual, it is true of Masses; if true of one man abstractly, it is true of all men in their mutual intercourse and relations. The Individual Man may not be considered as an insulated being. He is a member of a vast Family; his purest hopes, his sweetest emotions and joys, his highest and most sacred duties, and his noblest faculties relate to his existence as a social creature; and his true sphere and proper dignity are justly estimated, only, when we contemplate him as a link in that great chain of associated Spiritual Existences, which runs through households, communities and nations, which spans the World, binds Earth to Heaven and reaches even to the footstool of the Supreme Being. Surely then, the external as well as the internal life of the soul, its Social as well as its inward action, is developed in consonance with fixed fundamental rules, and in subservience to Divine Purposes; and thus we arrive at the conclusion that Man exists and acts as the component part of a SYSTEM.

GENTLEMEN OF THE SOCIETY, I have detained you a few moments in the consideration of these elementary truths, because they necessarily lead us to the idea of God as The Moral Head of The Universe, controlling the operations of matter and the actions of Spiritual Beings, in the Development of a System, and because they involve a view of HISTORY as an Organized Product, representing the motion and conflict of certain principles, and tending to the consummation of a comprehensive design.

A system implies the notion of complexity—of parts acting in mutual connexion and dependence with reference to some end; and in order aptly to study its laws and plan, the extent of our observation must be commensurate with its sphere of action. The horizon must be expanded, an eminence must be gained, whence as of a landscape, the eye can command a widely enlarged scene and the mind be filled at one and the same moment with every feature of the map extended before the vision. The generality of such a view should not tempt us to overlook or neglect the smallest object. True, a mere naked fact is in itself a trifle; an event isolated is as nothing; but as part of a scheme, as one of a series, as the offspring and the parent of another event, as grasping on the one hand the past and on the other the future, thus binding them together, as a stone in an edifice which has its place and which cannot be lost without impairing the beauty, perfection and harmony of the structure, every event however insignificant apparently, has in reality both a local and general importance. Thus in the development of an historical system we cannot afford to lose a single fact, for the whole is not perfect without the parts.

By applying this rule to an individual we gain a just and complete view of his life. But the actions of men are blended together, are fused in a single mass, as they become associated in communities and nations. Like men, nations act from impulse and passion, are animated by prejudices, or are controlled by reason, prudence and moral principle. Nations think and feel, they have a general mind, a common life, a unity of action, and in this corporate character perform a part in the history of the world. As the individual may not be conscious of the influence he exerts upon others, so communities may be ignorant of the part they bear in the great movements of humanity, and may dash blindly on to consummate ends hidden in the shadows of futurity; but still the purpose wrought out by their common life is none the less real and certain. If we advance another stage in our argument, therefore, and extend the limit of observation, we reach the idea of a History of Humanity, in which Nations are the individual actors; we rise to a view of human existence and action in the aggregate, to what Man has done as a Race, and to an apprehension of the principles which lie at the basis of Human Progress and Development. In this aspect, History may lose some of that thrilling interest, which fascinates the feelings and dazzles the imagination, in the records of personal achievements, and in the glory and renown of illustrious men, but it gains in positive greatness, in real sublimity, in true moral grandeur. The mind may be unwilling thus to be forced from its usual channels, from the contemplation of that which is partial, particular, and personal, to that which is general and universal, but how otherwise can a perfect idea of the true life of the world be attained? As well might the Philosopher, by shutting out the heavens from his vision and pondering only upon the phenomena of terrestrial matter, hope to perceive the magnificent regularity of the spheres which roll their ceaseless course on high, as the Historian to presume upon comprehending the Harmony which prevails in the History of man, by restricting his investigations to the narrow confines of national events. I grant that the task thus proposed is full of labor, and that the oracles of the past do not always speak in certain tones, but as of the Celestial it is said *one day telleth another, and one night certifieth another,—there is neither speech nor language, but their voices are heard among them,* so in the terrestrial we may reverently contemplate in the History of Man, those harmonious laws influencing and directing in noiseless energy the course of human events, whose voices are heard among them, certifying to the Providence of God, and the order He has established on Earth. Surely in the sense we now give it, History has a positive, substantial, organic subsistence; it is a reality, implying by its very existence, Laws by which its existence is regulated.

As these Laws are divinely instituted, History is not only orderly and methodical, but its order is perfect, its method full of wisdom. The events of six thousand years may at first seem complicated, confused and intricate, "a mighty maze without a plan," but look upon them as you would gaze at night upon the Host of Heaven, and though at first their very immensity may confound and perplex, yet by degrees order is discovered in their motion, symmetry in their arrangement, design in their construction, until at last a system of wonderful magnitude, and regular symmetrical arrangement, is perceived. To reach this point, however, we must look beneath the surface of things, and render no homage to the pomp and circumstance which emblazon the page of History. Men rush to view the thundering cataract, rather than the deep, quiet and majestic river. The storm and tempest attract attention, more than the still, profound, and almost imperceptible workings of nature. So in affairs of moral moment, we turn to wonder at the violent and convulsive, and overlook the calm, peaceful and steady movements of Humanity. But guarding against this error, we will find History neither partial, narrow or contracted,—not bound down to the record of what has been done by individuals, nations or races,—no longer disconnected in broken fragments,—no longer Grecian or Roman, or French or English,—no longer territorial. Dilating with an expansive impulse which bursts all bonds asunder, History thus becomes Universal. It contemplates Man as its sole theme, not Men as divided into communities, but Man as a Unit; it sweeps in all ages, from the creation to the present epoch, and viewing Man as a perfectible being, traces his progress through all time, in social moral and religious advancement, in knowledge, the cultivation of the sentiments, taste and intellect, and in the acquisition of physical and moral happiness.

To give this idea any vitality, we are to seek for some law which pervades this general common life of mankind, upon the basis of which we may successfully analyze the Past. Now there are two great chronological divisions, the one prior and the other subsequent to the Christian era, and there are likewise two great distinctive ages in the history of man, each characterised by peculiar features. Any comparison of these two must be defective, which is restricted to the consideration of particular epochs, or particular nations: thus we cannot judge accurately the whole Ante-Christian Era by the age of Pericles, or the whole Christian Era by the eighteenth century. So likewise, to contrast the two, we must not confine ourselves to any single, specific element, such for example as the prevalent forms of government, or the state of the arts and sciences. To attain a complete, and comprehensive, and intelligent view of the points of difference, we must regard ALL the elements entering into the condition of Humanity as developed in the WHOLE compass of time embraced in either age. THE HISTORY of CIVILIZATION alone affords the vast field of observation required. Civilization, taken in its broadest sense, is the product of the full development of all the faculties of man under proper regulation. An inquiry into its progress involves an examination of the history of art, science, all physical knowledge, education, social institutions, government, international law, moral order and all spiritual knowledge. Civilization is the state for which man, living under just religious influences, was fitted and designed, and which he was destined to attain. Like all vital existences, it has the quality of motion. If the principle of vitality which sustains it be physical, material, it may grow, as an herb or tree, and attain all the maturity of which it is capable, but in obedience to the law of its being it must then decay and die, even as any vegetable or animal organism, leaving perhaps, before perishing, its seeds to be planted in the same or another soil, whence again the young blade may shoot forth, again to mature and die. But if the vital principle of Civilization be imparted from the nobler nature of man, if it be spiritual in its origin and be regulated in its growth by the authority of a pure code of morals, the life thus given never departs. So long as the fountain bubbles, the broad stream flows ; as spirit never dies, that civilization which is its product is permanently progressive. Speaking generally, the moral and spiritual elements of humanity during the Ante-Christian Age were enthralled and conditionally held in subjection by the material,—hence the imperfection and mortality of all Ancient Civilization. The Christian Age on the other hand is conditionally characterized by the obedience of the soul to its maker, by that service which is freedom, and therefore modern civilization is permanently progressive and immortal.

Applying this touchstone of principle to social history, we perceive two points, to which, one or the other, all human action and movement tend,—Civilization and Barbarism,—the former the state for man in his nearest earthly approach to a perfect man,—the latter his state in his approximation to the animal,—the one the condition fit for a creature of passion, impulse, appetite, living by the chase, thoughtless of the morrow, substituting blind instincts for the domestic affections, and seeing beyond the grave, even in his brightest visions, nought but a physical sensuous paradise ; the other the condition of a wise, provident, thoughtful being, governed by moral law, subjecting his baser to his nobler nature, cultivating pure tastes and elevated sentiments, living by the peaceful labors of the field, nurturing and strengthening his affections and his sense of love and duty at the fireside, and looking for the fruition of his highest spiritual hopes in another life. These are the extremes, and between these humanity moves, rising or falling. I am certainly very far from intending that the Ante-Christian age was characterized by unmitigated barbarism, or that the Christian age has been marked by perfect civilization, but I do mean that all ancient civilization was, in its nature and essence, defective, limitable and perishable, and that modern civilization contains the elements of progressional life. These two great ages are divided, chronologically, by the first year of the Christian era, and are characterized generally, the first by the prevalence of Paganism and the last by that of Christianity; but as several centuries elapsed before even the most polished and refined nations of Europe were converted, as it is obvious that to this day the principles of the first age still predominate in all heathen countries, and will be exterminated only when the whole race shall be christianized, so it follows that civilization can become universal, only when the day predicted in the beatific visions of sacred prophecy shall arrive, and all men shall be gathered into one fold under one Shepherd.

To give any force to the views thus advanced, it is necessary to show their harmony with historical truth, and though the rapid survey I am compelled to make, must necessarily be general if not superficial, I propose to direct your attention for a few moments to the progress of the Ante-Christian Civilization. We are now discussing a question of advancement, and to do it rightly, should look to the beginning and the end. What then was the condition of man in the primeval ages? Many refined theorists have been wont to picture an original state of social infancy, and intellectual darkness, whence in slow gradation, after laborious and prolonged efforts, all the arts and sciences have tardily emerged. Unquestionably, vast regions of the earth are occupied by tribes whose intellect is clouded, whose moral sense is perverted and blunted, and who are skilled in no other arts than are essential to the preservation of existence, but is it certain that such was their original condition, or cannot we rather, by some feeble glimmerings of light amid their dark and unseemly institutions, perceive the wreck and fragments of a higher degree of knowledge, the remains of some shattered social fabric, the vestiges of lost intelligence,—as upon the wrinkled face of age, we oft discover the traces of youthful beauty, or in the organic remains of the rocky strata of the earth, find the petrified forms of animal life long since extinct. In vain do we search in history, for the indications of such a period of common, universal degradation. No man can point to the period—it never existed save in theory. We certainly find no evidence of it in the notices, which have reached us, of the state of humanity before the Deluge. Man, as we are told in the Genesis was formed in the express image of his Maker, and what more comprehensive language could have been chosen to indicate the sublime capacities of his nature? How reasonable then to attribute to the first impulses and exertions of the mind, in its original, primal, first-born energy, the most vigorous intellectual activity and rapid development. The primitive members of the human family were probably not enervated in mental and physical power, to such an extent as in subsequent ages, by moral turpitude and sensual excess, which appear to impair the faculties by some law of hereditary transmission and increment. The duration of antediluvian life, also, was favorable to more rapid and thorough attainments in knowledge, from the opportunity afforded for prolonged individual observation, experience and reflection. One of the penalties of our mortality is, that the learning acquired during the longest life is but just maturing into ripeness, when it is suddenly cut short and buried in the grave, to attain an imperfect resurrection with the youth of a new generation, after toil and study; but in the ages preceding the flood, centuries rolled on during the steady course of uninterrupted individual observation, and in the life of a single person, sciences might spring from the germ into ample expansion. In any event,—to reason only from what we know,—by the dim and misty light with which we see darkly that distant period, enough is still perceptible to authorise the inference that the human mind, instead of being plunged, at the very dawn of creation, into that dull, torpid, sensuous state visible in the blunted perception and intellectual inertia of barbarians, was marked in its action by freshness of strength, fertility of invention, and compass of thought and apprehension. Indeed many of the Arts now unknown to savages, and of which modern ingenuity boasts, as her offspring, may be traced so far back, that the recorded memory of man never ran to the contrary. The origin of the art of writing lies beyond the reach of authentic profane history, and language appears to have been thus represented before the picture-writings and hieroglyphics were in use. There are several traditions which ascribe to it an origin before the flood; the particularity of the genealogies in the Genesis very strongly favors this idea; Eustathius says the Pelasgians were called divine, because they alone of all the Greeks possessed the use of letters after the deluge; writing is mentioned in Job, one of the most ancient and venerable of works; and in fine who is there can assert that letters were unknown in the antediluvian ages. But let us examine in other particulars. Of Adam's sons, one was a tiller of the earth, and another a shepherd. As we proceed from the Creation we learn that social institutions were formed, the useful arts practised, and that music and astronomy were cultivated. Cain is recorded to have built a city, Jubal is commemorated as the father of all who handle the harp and organ, and Tubal-Cain was an instructor of artificers in brass and iron. At a later period, The Ark was constructed, the year was divided into months, and was probably calculalated nearly at its real duration; and, as Sir William Drummond has endeavored to prove, there is reason to believe the signs of the Zodiac were marked out. Noah was acquainted with the division of animals into clean and unclean, and the basis of the natural system of Botany, as laid down by Jussieu, is to be found in the first Chapter of Genesis. The Babylonians considered their country to have been rich and flourishing before the deluge, and in the Book of Job we have a remarkable reference to the knowledge of the former age. Indeed let any one peruse this inspired book with direct relation to the evidences it contains of the state of society and the arts and sciences at the period it describes, and besides the indications afforded of very considerable advancement in various of the useful arts, he will discover hints relative to cosmical and astronomical facts, of a startling nature in view of the early time they were made.

Immediately after the flood we meet with additional tokens of civilization. We read of "bows of steel and molten mirrors," and of the manufacture of burnt bricks. The account of Babel proves that mankind were already associated in large communities and in cities. The institution of Castes, which prevailed at a very early day in Assyria, as well as in Egypt and India, shows the existence of different trades and a division of labor. In the time of Abraham coined money was in use, and the condition of society argued its long previous existence. "Powerful kingdoms were already established; great cities had been built; and regular armies were maintained. Mankind already witnessed the pomp of courts and the luxury of individuals. Pharaoh appeared surrounded with his princes; Abimelech came attended with the Captain of his Hosts, and Abraham himself was rich in gold and silver, in tents, in flocks and herds." (*Origines*, 1, 102.)

The monuments of the Egyptians, to whom the Pelasgians, Greeks, Etrurians and Romans were so greatly indebted, will sufficiently enable us, without much detail, to illustrate the advancement which had been attained a few ages after the Ark rested on Ararat. Eighteen hundred years before Christ the Egyptians were acquainted with the manufacture of linen, constructed cabinet ware with taste and elegance, were skilled in the working and smelting of gold, silver, copper, lead, brass and iron, and were familiar with other metallurgic arts, and with the phenomena and laws of chemistry, the very name of which science is of Egyptian origin. They embalmed the bodies of the dead, manufactured various liquors, possessed pigments of great lustre and permanence, formed artificial gems of exquisite beauty, and of such delicate workmanship as to suggest the belief that the microscope must have been used in their cutting, excelled in the curious art of staining glass of divers colors, and fabricated vases of pottery and porcelain in forms of the most graceful elegance. In music they understood the triple symphony, in geometry and astronomy they were well versed, and their architectural monuments still astonish the world. In the days of Joseph their caravans brought spices and other products from the east, their commerce extended to distant nations and their civil and religious institutions were firmly established. It has been contended that at a later day they used telescopes in their astronomical observations, and knew that the planets Venus and Mars revolved around the Sun. Thales, and Pythagoras the father of the Copernican system, who claimed to have measured the distance between the Earth Sun and Moon, to have determined the magnitude of those bodies, and the periods of the revolutions of the stars and planets, are reported to have visited Egypt and to have been instructed in geometry and astronomy by the Priests of Heliopolis. But there is no necessity of indulging in supposition ; abundance of positive evidence, monumental and historical, exists, to establish the very early attainment of a high degree of Civilization by the primitive people who inhabited the valley of the Nile, and to suggest the belief that could we recover the lost treasures of the Alexandrian Library, what now seems hardy conjecture might fall far short of the truth. We may add that an investigation into the ancient history of the Chaldeans, Hindoos, Chinese, Toltecs, Peruvians and other primitive nations, also justifies a belief in their early civilization.

Indeed it is remarkable of all the races of men belonging to the old primal stock, that their traditions generally assign the origin of the arts to a very remote age, to an antediluvian epoch,—the golden age,—"The age of the Gods,"—or to an heroic or fabulous origin, and agree that they were existing at a period of unexplored antiquity. Is it possible, in the face of this testimony, to regard the rude and ignorant tribes of the earth as the inheritors of an original barbarism common to all mankind before the separation? The Hindoo traditions declare barbarians to be outcasts who have been driven from society, or who have wandered away from their parent stock, and subsequently became degraded; but philosophers of the present day, wiser than the Hindoo, maintain that barbarians are capable of originating and perfecting their own civilization—a position which is, I feel free to say, unsupported by a single historical fact and contrary to the entire course of events through all antiquity. There has been too much of mere speculation on this subject, and truth has been sacrificed to help out a theory. As most of our standard historians have generalised conclusions founded upon the course of the ancient empires, applied them to modern governments, and taught that of necessity nations must have their rise and decadence,—so the modern conviction of the sure, steady and onward career of human cultivation and improvement in the future, has generated the idea that the converse is true, and as progress must have had its beginning, that the steps of this advancement may be retraced in the past, until a period is reached when the whole human race occupied a common level with the rude and unpolished savage. Both positions are unsound. We have seen enough of the first age of the world, to wonder at its refinement and knowledge rather than to deplore its ignorance, and to discover that as time rolled on, although much may have been lost far more was handed down and borrowed, so that as each successive nation took its place upon the stage of history, it became deeply indebted for its polish and civilization to those which had proceeded it. The great body of the Greek mythology for example was of Egyptian origin, and the curious investigator in myths and religious mysteries, often left the shores of the Ægean to receive instruction in the temples of the Nile from the priests of the Sun.

If we now turn from the earlier to the later days of the Ante-Christian age, we will perceive mankind, not emerging from barbarism, but sinking slowly and surely before its irresistible progress. The admirer of classic lore and the student of Grecian and Roman history may start at this position, and meet it with indignant denial. It is true, Greece has transmitted to us the noblest heritage of art and literature we have received from antiquity, and the loftiest human speculations upon the moral law; but her civilization was as perishable as that of her ancestral nations. The very height she gained made her fall the more apparent; the expiring flame of Paganism but burnt the more brightly to deepen the darkness which followed. The sun of ancient civilization reached its culmination at Athens, but attained its meridian only to leave it and descend beneath the horizon. Let us pause a moment at that little spot where the genius of the most refined and intellectual people of antiquity accomplished all that human effort alone could accomplish. As you pass under the majestic portico of the Parthenon, observe that chaste, exquisite and noble architectural model, illustrative in its proportions and design of the simple, the symmetrical, the beautiful and the stately. As you wander among the crumbling ruins of her theatres, recall the names of Æschylus and Sophocles, and remember the sublimity, and the deep and tender sweetness of her dramatists. Cast your eye across the waves as they roll to the isle of the blind man who sang of Troy, and forget not Homer; and as you are pointed to the place where in academic grove Socrates and his disciples taught a profound and almost Christian Philosophy, learn how noble and glorious a creation was the human soul, and yet how impotent all its struggles for the attainment of an enduring civilization. Here we may discover a race living in the latter days of the first age, inheriting all its treasures of knowledge and thought, which did all that man could do to attain a lasting civilization. If ever there lived a human being who could arrest the progress of decay and infuse fresh vigor and vitality into the frame of a perishing system, that man was Plato. He taught the existence of a Supreme Intelligence,—spiritual, eternal, unchangeable,—that the soul emanated from God,—that virtue consists in the effort of the soul to imitate its Maker,—that truth, and beauty, and love, and goodness are worthy of the highest veneration, —and that the ends of society are moral happiness, liberty and universal concord. But these were abstract dogmas, topics for scholastic wrangling, defective in practical influence from the want of authoritative sanctions. Revelation alone can give effective authority to a system of morals, Christianity alone can afford the power of control over vice, and every philosophy which is based on the sufficiency of man to attain these ends, contains the seeds of death. And such was the destiny of antiquity, yes, death so complete that the very monuments which are scattered over the seats of ancient civilization, the material fabrics erected by the Egyptian, the Hindoo, the Greek, the Roman, the Mexican, and the Peruvian have survived the societies of men which constructed them. The statues and columns, the collossal temples and palaces, the Teocalli, Pagodas and Pyramids, the great military walls, canals, and public works constructed thousands of years since, are left in desolate silence, and the degenerate Greek, the ignorant Indian, or degraded Copt when asked who built them, answers, "who knows?"

Such then we find to have been the course of national existence in the first age. Nations then were fitly emblemized by the changes of material nature. They had their epochs of youth, manhood, and age. They were born, they matured, and they died. In mournful succession they have all passed away under as stern and unbending a rule as that of human life. The ancients themselves were conscious of this law. The signs of decay around them were too palpable to admit of doubt. One of them says "the fates decree that all things shall fall into ruin;" and they conceived the idea that nature had successive periods of creation, degradation, and regeneration,—its ages of gold, of silver, of brass, and of iron,—and that when the human race had reached its limit of self-corruption it would be destroyed to give place to a new creation, fresh from the hands of God. They felt the languor of approaching dissolution stealing through the frame of society, and in the later days of antiquity we observe the almost universal belief that a new and brighter epoch of regeneration was at hand. This singular prediction of Paganism imbued many of their writings, and imparted a tint of mingled melancholy and hope to the dying reflections of their philosophy. It were vain then to conceal that "the life hourly oozed out" of the ancient world, and that the time had arrived for the introduction of a new element, the reception of a new system, the beginning of the second epoch: The Christian era.

The external progress of Christianity was rapid,—the internal slow. Power succumbed to it, monarchs believed, nominally or really, the law recognized it, but ages elapsed before it prevailed *inwardly* in the heart of society. The direction and control of Christian society was left by the conversion of kings and rulers in the same hands, and the influence of the Christian system upon the arts, sciences, social, educational, and political institutions, being thus repressed was gradual, but being gradual was the more certain. This process was going on in the dark and scholastic ages. Let us not judge rashly that interesting period. If we look steadily into this night of time, we see the firmament with many stars to illumine the darkness. That age, apparently so death-like, was full of action. Christianity was striking its roots deep into the soil; it was conceiving; principles were being argued and developed; the straggling elements of social order found each its centre, around which they were arranged, and while a quiet organic action was taking place, by which national relations were established, the human mind was being prepared for an assertion and practical recognition of *all* the principles of Christianity, in *all* their bearings. Then came the Reformation,—a great movement, *primarily* directed against gross superstitions and ecclesiastical abuses, but secondarily and necessarily involving the momentous questions of religious and civil liberty. This great convulsion. in itself the legitimate development of the principles of Christianity, broke the manacles in which Humanity had been held in bondage by Priest and Sovereign, and left the irrepressible energies of the soul to their natural action and expansion, unrestrained, save by the control and power of religion. Man began to be recognized as a Citizen as well as a Subject, and though every effort was made to subdue and stifle these novel and dangerous opinions, kings were at last shaken on their thrones. Still a system of government which had descended from the loins of Paganism, and been strengthening for fifteen hundred years, was not to be uprooted as if by a whirlwind ; and despotic power retained a vigorous though modified ascendancy. I venture to assert that the order and symmetry of history are no where more clearly perceptible than in the process of compensation ; a process which often anticipates but always supplies the wants of an age. Thus when all men were craving light and thirsting for communion with the master spirits of this epoch, and eager to drink at the fountain of the inspired word of God so long denied to them, the art of printing appeared to supply the demand. So likewise when those, whose hearts were full of the impulses and hopes generated in the midst of this universal agitation, found Europe a great prison house, behold, royal fleets were sent on missions to extend the boundaries of geographical knowledge, and under the auspices of the very monarchs who founded the inquisition, the Genoese mariner was crossing the trackless ocean in quest of another world to become the home of those persecuted for conscience sake.

There are no accidents in history. When we reflect how long the western world had been unknown to the eastern, though inhabited by an oriental race ; when we find even the discovery achieved by the Northmen in the Icelandic voyages, nipped in the bud, as of premature growth, and unproductive of extensive practical uses ; and when we ask ourselves why this continent was thus concealed from the rest of the nations until the last ages of the world, why it was not discovered at some earlier period, we may darken counsel by pointing to secondary causes, but still the great palpable fact stands out in bold relief, that America was reserved,—that America was discovered precisely when for the interests of humanity it ought to have been discovered; and what stronger evidence of design can we demand.

When Columbus, seven months after he had launched into the unknown waste of the western ocean, returned to Spain with his glorious tidings, his march in triumphal procession to meet his sovereigns was greeted with the firing of cannon, the ringing of bells, and other tokens of public joy, and as he closed the recital of his adventures in the presence of Ferdinand and Isabella, they fell upon their knees and thanked Almighty God for the glory which had crowned their enterprise. But their dim vision reached not to the almost incomprehensible results of that great event. Their homage and thanks were rendered for Spain. Columbus announced his glorious work in exulting strains; "let processions be made, festivals held, temples be filled with branches and flowers, for Christ rejoices on earth as in heaven, seeing the future redemption of souls; let us rejoice, also, for the temporal benefit to Spain and to all Christendom." But even the great navigator, who with a sublime enthusiasm believed himself, in this instance, to be the instrument of a special Providence, and that his enterprise had been predicted in the prophecies of holy scripture, failed to grasp a true idea of the magnitude of his achievement; and the motto borne upon his arms and sculptured on his tomb evinced the same unconsciousness,—"for Castile and Leon Columbus discovered a New World." Could we change the inscription, we would say, "as an asylum for Liberty of Conscience and Human Freedom, Columbus Discovered a New World." It is said that Ferdinand the son of the Genoese found something mysterious and typical in his father's name of Columbus, signifying a dove—the emblem in profane mythology and in sacred history, of peace and love.

Though we may dispute the mystic sense asserted to be contained in the name, yet how apposite and beautiful is the image thus presented, of the great màriner returning over the ocean in his little bark, with glad tidings, and as the winged messenger of peace, bearing the olive branch from the New to the Old World, emblematic of the blessings thence to flow in all future ages.

But whatever may at that day have been thought of the discovery, we can now comprehend its true usefulness ; we can now see that it was essential for the nurture and growth of the principles of civil and religious liberty, which were the legitimate fruits of the reformation, that they should be transplanted in a new soil : hence the value and the necessity of America. The fixed forms of European society, the feudal system and the various modifications of aristocratical and monarchical institutions were all hostile to the full, free and unchecked development of these principles. They needed a pure, untainted atmosphere, a clear field, unchoked by the weeds that had grown up from the corruption of ages—a strong virgin soil, where in the unbroken solitude of the wilderness they might attain a giant strength before they were attacked. The Old Pagan Era had met its death on the old continent, the New Era was to attain its manhood on the New Continent. New elements were in operation, and a New People were to to be born in a New World, to embody and develop these truths. But where were this people to be placed? America is a vast continent, but what part of it is peculiarly fitted for the nativity of a great people, charged with the consummation of this momentous design? The physical geography of the earth has much to do with its history. The geographical features of a country are intimately connected with the character and destiny of its people. Whither then would the steps of the exiles of Europe be directed? what region was best fitted for their abode? "Gold," said Columbus, exulting over the mines of wealth he had discovered, "is an excellent thing. With gold one forms treasures ; with gold one does whatever one wishes in this world ; even souls can be got to paradise by it." Stimulated by cupidity, and attracted by the barbaric splendor which shone resplendently at the courts of Cuzco and Mexico, Spain seized with rapacity on those rich regions. But in the sunny vales of the south where the earth yields a copious fount of silver and gold, and nature bears in spontaneous luxuriance her choicest fruits, human energy sinks into torpid slumber; and that martial ardor, that spirit of enthusiastic enterprise which animated Hernan Cortez with nine hundred men to the conquest of great and populous nations, was soon dried up by the fervor of the tropics. Gold cannot secure political harmony, social progress, or national greatness. Behold, even at this day the spirit of liberty caught from our own happy country, and wafted to the south, struggling unceasingly with natural and social obstacles. The American eagle is justly represented as soaring aloft in the air; but the Mexican eagle is perched upon the Nopal, the emblem of the tropics,--nature has fettered it to the earth. But what region, I repeat, would wisdom select as best fitted for the habitation of a great nation, charged with the development of some of the most important elements of the new era? what should be its physical characteristics? I answer, a soil which would both stimulate and reward labor—a climate which would at seasons demand exertion to secure protection against its inclemencies—an almost boundless territory, stretching from ocean to ocean, thus favoring by sea and land the expansion of national greatness—which should reach through various degrees of temperature and abound with all the varied productions of nature, thus favoring the closest commercial intercourse and social union—a country with immense prairies, vast lakes, lofty mountains, majestic rivers, great cataracts, all on a scale of grandeur and sublimity, thus familiarizing the national mind with the noblest scenes of nature, rebuking narrow and contracted views, and generating a sympathy for the elevated and expansive.

To such a country came the apostles of human liberty, and our revolutionary struggle, and those noble institutions under which we live and flourish, are, under the blessing of God, the fruits of their pilgrimage.

But how were the people entrusted with so momentous a mission, and about to perform so important a part in the last age of the world, to be descended? Were they to come from one stock or from many? The characteristic of this age is, that it possesses the fruits of human exertion, intellect, taste and genius produced through all time—the accumulated knowledge and experience of six thousand years. It combines all, and seeks to digest and develope all, under the influence of a new code of morals. A single lineage for this people would only have preserved and enlarged local peculiarities and prejudices. All that was partial and local was to be obliterated. The races of the old world were to be commingled, and fused into one mass in the new. By mutual contact, religious bigotries were to be tempered; and thus amid the throng that landed on our shores, we find as well the Roman Catholic, as the Huguenot and the Pilgrim Puritan, not only the Anglo Saxon, but the Bohemian, the Tueton, the Spaniard, the Celt, the Finn, the Norman, and the Swede. Though the Anglo-Saxon element may predominate, yet this composite origin has produced a race of varied capacity and of liberal character.

It is unnecessary, as it might be vain glorious, to recount what this race has achieved, how much it has contributed to elevate the condition of man, and how vast an influence it has exercised towards the destruction of hereditary distinctions, despotic power and religious tyranny, in Europe. But I may be permitted for a moment to dwell on that distinguishing feature which marks the position of the American Citizen—the exercise of self government without any restraint except moral restraint. By freedom I mean, not the want of all law and social order—not that spirit of licentious independence which is the birthright of savages—not those technical forms of free government which are satisfied with the names of Consuls and Senates and Legislative Assemblies; but that freedom which rests the rights of man upon the laws ordained by his maker—which comes with the breath of life—which, when nationalized, infuses animation and vital energy into the entire frame-work of society and stimulates every man, the poorest and the humblest, to ameliorate his condition, and improve and elevate his soul. If we examine the history of ancient art and knowledge we learn that they were not free; science was the property of privileged classes, learning was hidden in the cloisters of the temple. No artizan dared to invade the rules prescribed for the exercise of his art by this superior power; the myriads of human beings who toiled in raising the pyramids, the sculptor who chiselled out the head of Memnon, were mere machines, the knowledge which directed them belonged to their masters, and if ever confided to them, was entrusted in the shape of technical rules and formulæ, the principles of which were concealed. The inevitable result of this state of the arts was their direction towards the aggrandizement of the higher castes, while the people were left in comparative discomfort. We pause in amazement before the Teocallis, which still tower on the plains of Central America, and the immense porticoes of temples and palaces which cover the shores of the Nile, and see that the idol and the heathen god were provided with stately houses of worship, and that the monarchs lived in superb mansions. But where are the abodes of the people? Could we see Mexico and Egypt when flourishing in their glory, by the side of those monuments of power and superstition would be observed the humble thatched dwellings of the people. It was their lot to labor, to build, to hew the stone, to raise the column, and to eat the bread of subjection. It was theirs to sweat and toil for others, to know how knowledge elevates man, increases his comforts and powers, dignifies his condition and promotes his happiness, and yet to see that knowledge appropriated and controlled by a few. Turn we now to our own day and generation and we find knowledge diffused and the arts cultivated for the benefit of all. The existence of seventeen millions of human beings, each possessing an equal claim to the fullest enjoyment of which his nature and condition are capable, has created a demand upon the arts which has been met by a corresponding development, cheapening their products and scattering widely their treasures. The artificial rivers, the long lines of railroads, the ceaseless manufactory, the leviathan steamer, the printing press, these are not of right nor in fact for privileged classes, but the humblest of us may enjoy them and their products at a moderate cost. Nay, all our vast public works are undertaken for the good of the many and not of the few, and are designed to bring their blessings to the door of every man, just as at this day the pure water of a distant stream flows through our streets in numberless rivulets, torn from its native channels to bless with the best of God's bounties, each denizen of this great city. But these are matters of fact and history so palpable that I need not dwell upon them, but from the past and the present, now direct your attention to the future.

"Modern History" says Dr. Arnold, "is the last step; it appears to bear marks of the fullness of time, as if there would be no future History beyond it." Now it is evident, that the mass of human society is moving in the same direction America is moving, but we are in the advance. The question of deep interest is whether this march will be arrested. In reply to those who predict our ruin, it is idle to boast of external advantages. When our staticians tell us that we possess an area of 2,300,000 square miles, and more than a thousand millions of acres of unsold public lands, that we have coal fields 700 miles in extent, 4000 miles of railroad, with 50 different lines of canals; that our crops of grain and other edibles equal 700,000,000 of bushels; that there are educated in our three thousand academies and 50,000 primary schools two million of our youth, and that in our libraries scattered throughout the union there are 900,000 volumes of books, we cannot but estimate these as signs of great power and prosperity: they are the tokens of life, but do not constitute the vital principle itself. For this we must look deeper.

If we search carefully for the great verities, growing out of the Christian system, which affect man as a citizen, in contradistinction to man as an individual, we find them embodied in the words, Religious and Civil freedom—the disunion of all forcible connexion of Church and State, and the right of men to govern themselves: or in the language of our charter of independence, the inalienable right of every man, to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness: These are ours by history, by religion, by inheritance, and by Law. Exercised in subjection to Christian principle they have been the cause of our success as a nation: they are pregnant with power, life and permanence. Full of life, they are also full of motion, and never till every abritrary institution be levelled, every base prejudice, every unjust privilege. every violent restraint be removed, will they have fulfiled their mission. Their spirit, like an angel of peace and mercy with healing on her wings, has visited the cottage of the poor, and pronounced that as by birth they are men, so by law they are men. It has overcome the legalized usurpation of centuries, and left man to the exercise of self-government.

The idea of *individual* self government involves the control of the passions, apetites, physical and intellectual excesses, and man approaches nearest its realization as a Christian–so likewise the idea of *national* self government involves a similar subjection, and no nation can realize it except a Christian nation. For as every thing human tends to excess, as even virtue may be carried into severe austerity—as justice may be stretched to the bloody limits of Draconian Law—so liberty may run riot in unrestrained license--so considerate reform may be hurried into disorganizing violence—so society may be dissolved into its original elements and be flung back from civilization into barbarism. The element which I have pointed out as distinguishing modern from ancient civilization, destroying the one and vitalising the other, the element which has originated human freedom and secured its birth, growth and continued life—its progress and its ascendance—this element, it must never be forgotten is Christianity. The great question of the permanence of our form of goverment is thus answered; it depends on our faith and practice as Christians, individually and nationally. To those therefore who with shallow Philosophy predict the decadence of this goverment, because the like hath been the repeated fate of the nations of antiquity, we can reply by showing that our institutions are placed upon a different basis; that there is nothing apposite or analogous between the first and last ages of the world, and that if we realize the idea of a Christian commonwealth, our institutions will be placed upon an immutable basis.

There is another interesting question growing out of the peculiar character of our goverment, which is often suggested in connexion with our national existence. So far, however, from involving the ultimate destruction of the nation, it tends to elucidate another lesson which America has taught the old world. I mean, the supposed impossibility of enlarging our territory, and at the same time continuing the Union. "We are told that the ancient Etrurians, the Rasena of Italy," as their history proves to us, "had conceived the wise and singular policy of making with those whom they had conquered such a peace, as gave them a share in the government." The Romans adopted the same system, and cemented the bonds of their vast empire, by thus giving the conquered an interest in the permanence and superiority of the state, and constituting them a part of the national family. Upon a more enduring basis, we have more perfectly developed the same idea. We are not a mere confederation—the general government exists by its own independent power, but the States share in it—and yet for municipal purposes we are not a consolidated empire, but each State, for local objects, rules itself. The individuality of the States is preserved in its proper sphere, the parts have their independent action to be varied according to the wants, the character, the local condition, habits and occupations. They are left to exercise all local legislation, and are limited only in objects of general and national legislation. We thus have multiplicity in unity, petty provinces incorporate in one great body, many local governments for local purposes, one national government for national purposes The bond of affinity remains equally energetic though the number of the component parts be increased. By enlargement the attractive power is not diminished, the repulsive power is not strengthened. So long as the process of accretion, aggregation and incorporation into the great body politic, is carried on, not by unjust encroachment, not by conquest, but as the result of an enlightened preference, as the dictate of voluntary desire to become a member of the family, it may be continued without danger. If this be true of ten States, it is true of a hundred contiguously situated. A system in which each member forms part of a compact whole, and yet retains its individuality for all objects appertaining to the individual, possesses no principle of disunion, but may be indefinitely extended. Its capacity is not limited by territory, it may embrace a great family of nations, extending from Labrador to Darien, from New York to Oregon. It presents the spectacle of a union of nations, for common objects, for the preservation of peace, international harmony, social concord and brotherhood, one and inseparable. Could we see the prospect dawning upon Europe, as upon America, of such a Congress of Nations, it would seem like the first gleams of light ushering in that blissful period, when war shall cease upon the earth.

To this argument for the probability of the permanence of our national existence, may be added the fact that though citizens of different state sovereignties, our people are possessed mainly of the same system of laws, the same institutions and customs, and the same language. Coleridge justly termed "the possible destiny of the United States of America, as a nation of a hundred millions of freemen, stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific, living under the laws of Alfred and speaking the language of Shakespeare and Milton," "an august conception." But as we remember that when "the whole earth was of one language and of one speech," to "scatter abroad" the nations "upon the face of the earth," their language was "confounded," we can rightly estimate the influence of "one language and one speech" in binding the nations together again in one family, in making them members of one vast commonwealth, and in cementing and perpetuating our own Union.

From themes so inviting I must hasten to ask you in conclusion, from the point we have now gained, to contrast the first with the second age of the world. The first was debased by a multitude of miserable mythologies and degrading superstitions, the second tends to the predominance of one pure and ennobling religion, the former was marked by a repetition of ceaseless efforts during four thousand years, to attain some form of permanence and progression, the latter presents but one great current ever flowing onward; in the first, the Material and human were predominant, in the second, the Spiritual; the arts and civilization of the first contained the seeds of their own dissolution, in the latter we see no limits to their course; the chronicles of the one are occupied with dire conflicts, in the history of the other peace begins to reign over war; the inherent generic property of the one was decay and barbarism, the element of the other is progressive life; the exhausted energies of the first were expiring in Europe and western Asia at the commencement of our era; the vigor, glory and brightness of the second, which then sprang into existence, have not yet attained their maturity. From the Christian era, or rather from that time when the civilization of Greece and Rome was finally buried in a common grave, when the light of their science and literature was extinguished and the new and brighter light of a divine religion began to exert its power, from that period when the weak vitality of the old pagan system became extinct, and even the fresh invasion of northern barbarism was subdued by the renovating influence of another code of morals, humanity has been advancing in a steady and unfaltering course of improvement. Thus is the whole history of man divided in twain, and thus do we find all history teaching that Man's most exalted position as an individual, as a social and intelectual being and as a citizen, depends upon his existence as a moral being; and that the permanence of arts, civilization, goverment and all beneficent human institution, is inseparably connected with the Christian Religion. May this precious truth be engraven deep on the National Heart, and be taught to our children from generation to generation.